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ABSTRACT

Knowledge of students' learning styles can be a valuable tool in counseling them on what type of job/work environment they will be most satisfied in. A student's preference for work environments can be assessed by using learning style inventories, such as Canfield's, since many of the characteristics people prefer in the learning environment correspond to similar characteristics in work environments. Canfield's inventory identifies individual preferences for conditions, content, mode, and expectancy. Conditions refer to preferences for working with peers or working alone, and preference for organization, attention to detail, knowing the instructor and authority. Content preferences are for numeric, qualitative (words), inanimate objects, or people. Mode identifies how an individual prefers to receive information: listening, reading, ironic (diagrams), and direct experience: while expectancy refers to a person's expectation of success at a learning task or a job. Using the learning style inventory as a guidance tool, the counselor can help the student identify the strongest preferences from the condition, content, and mode groups and compare these characteristics to task analyses of specific occupations. Knowledge of learning style will help the individual to select an occupation where the stimulus conditions of the work environment will be positive reinforcers. (KC)

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LEARNING STYLE
as a
TOOL IN CAREER GUIDANCE

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Learning Style as a Tool in Career Guidance

Career guidance has become more than just matching the skills and abilities of the individual with the skills and abilities required of the job. More recently, the dimension of job satisfaction is receiving emphasis. Job satisfaction is often related to meaningfulness of the job for the individual. Cull and Hardy state that, "It is recognized that the experience of meaningfulness is related to both the characteristics of the job and the characteristics of the individual."

One of the most useful and practical frames of reference for dealing with the meaning of work and/or work satisfaction has been provided by the research team at the University of Minnesota who have spearheaded the Minnesota studies of Vocational Rehabilitation. The principal investigation (Davis, Lofquist, and Weiss) have written a series of monographs describing their investigations. The studies are systematically programmed to investigate their theory of work adjustment.

The Theory of Work Adjustment is based on the correspondence between the individual and his work environment. An interacting system is described. On the one hand, the individual brings himself with his abilities, potentialities, and developed skills to the work environment. On the other hand, the work environment provides, or has the potentiality of providing, reinforcers to the individual. The reinforcers in the work environment are described in terms of the wages, status, personal relationships and additional factors which other writers have suggested provide meaning and satisfaction in work. The individual responds to the requirements of the work environment and the work environment responds to the requirements of the individual. When there is a balance between these two, then work adjustment is described by the theory as correspondent.

The overt behavioral sign of correspondence between the work environment and the individual is noted through job tenure-or the length of time that he stays on the job.

This work adjustment theory provides a convenient way of examining job satisfaction. The theory holds that the individual interacts with the work environment and experiences a variety of stimulus conditions, many of which he finds reinforcing. The major variables that define the workers total job satisfaction may be grouped under both abilities and needs. Abilities are the skills that an individual has developed or is capable of developing. Needs are preferences for responding to certain stimulus conditions which have been experienced to be reinforcing.

A model for Career Guidance would then include an assessment which would measure one's preference for the work environment as well as the commonly used assessment of one's aptitude, interests, skills and abilities. It is the assessment of one's preference for the work environment that I would like to direct the focus of this paper. We can assess an individuals preference for work environments by using Learning Style Inventories. While, at the present time, these inventories are intended for use in learning environments, many of the characteristics people prefer in the learning environments correspond to similar characteristics in work environments. There are several Learning Style Inventories available, but for the purpose of this paper, I have selected Canfield's Learning Style Inventory to present an analysis.

This inventory identifies an individuals preferences for conditions, content, mode and expectancy. The group of elements under conditions can greatly assist the individual in identifying those preferences

important in one's work environment. These include a preference for working with peers or working alone, a preference for organization, attention to detail, knowing the instructor, and a preference for authority. Through this assessment, an individual will identify which of these conditions are more highly preferred and which have a lower preference. If an individual prefers to work with peers, have good relations with the students, and have student friends, then those jobs in which the person works with others the majority of the time would be more satisfying. Good relations on the job being important, the individual would tend to work toward building rapport with fellow employees and develop a teamwork approach toward the tasks to be accomplished. Dissatisfaction would probably result if he were working with those to whom this quality was not important. On the other hand, if a person prefers to work alone, then those jobs where the majority of the work is performed independently, would be more desirable. When working where teamwork is important, this kind of person tends to go ahead and do his own thing with little regard for the togetherness required of the task. As a result, he may view his fellow employees as "not carrying their share of the load", "waiting for someone else to get them going", or "too dependent on their fellow workers." The group work environment that relies strongly on a teamwork approach leads to a great deal of dissatisfaction for the person who prefers to work alone.

The individual to whom organization is a high preference will prefer a work setting in which the tasks to be accomplished are clearly outlined and there is a logical sequence of activities. This individual may become frustrated in a work situation where the general sequence of events is often interrupted and results in realignment of the originally planned sequence. Attention to detail is a preference for some individuals and they prefer jobs in which detail is important. In those jobs where

generalizations are more important than detail they will become "bogged down" in trying to extricate the details from the tasks. Thus they spend more time than needed to complete the task, and they expend time and energy trying to explain to fellow workers or supervisors the details they have uncovered that they believe to be highly important. To the fellow employees or supervisors this person is often evaluated as less productive, a slower worker, etc. At the same time, this individual cannot understand the other workers attitudes of disregard for the details he believes are so important. This kind of person would find greater job satisfaction in a work setting that utilized his preference for attention to detail.

A preference for getting to know the instructor, having a mutual understanding and liking one another is very important for some students. For those students to whom this is very important, and due to a lack of understanding of this characteristic, these students often call those to whom it is important, "apple polishers". Likewise in the job setting many employees want to know their supervisor, have a mutual understanding and like one another. Attaining a good relationship with their supervisor contributes to their job satisfaction. Similarly in the job setting as in the student teacher setting, strong criticism of "apple polishing" results from fellow employees to whom this characteristic is not important toward the one to whom it is. This kind of criticism carried over a period of time creates disatisfaction among the group of workers. An understanding of this characteristic by the group of employees working under a supervisor can alleviate much of the criticism. This characteristic may vary from one company to another. The person applying for the job can therefore attain this information through asking questions related to this characteristic during the job interview.

The individual who has a high preference for authority desires classroom discipline and order or having informed, knowledgeable instructors. In the job setting the employee prefers an employer or supervisor who monitors the company policies, rules and regulations and in a sense "keeps everybody in line". Or if he defines authority as "informed and knowledgeable" he expects his employee or supervisor to be able to answer his job related questions or be able to step in and perform his assigned task as well as he can.

If goal setting is an important characteristic for an individual his job satisfaction will be enhanced if he is given the freedom and responsibility to set some of his own goals . Some individuals may want to be able to entirely set their own goals and thereby would prefer to be in a work setting that would allow this. Others may be satisfied or even prefer to be able to set personal achievement goals within the context of a larger overall goal of a company or organization. Yet others would prefer the goals be set and just be told what they are.

Competition defined as desiring comparison with others, knowing how one is doing in relation to others, is another characteristic and one we are often told is very important in our overall society as well as the business world. However, while some students thrive on competition, we find many students who will retreat when competition in the classroom gets too high. In the world of work there are jobs that are highly competitive and others where competition is not so great. It is probably impossible to say that there are any jobs where there is never any competition but it may fit into job patterns in different ways. One may meet the competition by developing a skill to a level of competence that they will be assured of attaining a good job. They are confident that they have acquired that skill to a greater degree than many others. Once on the job they continue to build greater competence in that skill which they explain

in terms of performing their job better. This can be defined as a kind of competition. People tend to refer to this kind of competition as internal competition or competition with oneself. External competition is comparing oneself to another person and trying to be better at a skill in order to produce more than the other person. Some kinds of jobs require some measure of competition all the way up the scale to those that are highly competitive. To the individual for whom competition is a preference, job success may be measured in how well he compares to his fellow employees and if, in his judgement, he compares favorable it brings him satisfaction in his job. On the other hand, this kind of competition brings disatisfaction to the individual with a low preference in this area. These people tend to refer to highly competitive activities as a real "rat race" and develop great disatisfaction in those kinds of jobs.

The group of chareacteristics Canfield lists under content are preference for numeric, qualitative, inanimate and people. Preferences for these kinds of activities are often identified through interest tests or aptitude tests. Most students can readily identify which of these characteristics they prefer without any kind of assessment administered to them.

Through past experiences with subjects they have taken, students can relate whether or not they have a high preference for numeric which is working with numbers and logic, computing, solving mathematic problems, etc. Qualitative is a preference for working with words or language as in writing, editing or talking. Inanimate refers to working with things, building, reparing, designing or operating. Those who prefer working with people prefer jobs where there is a great deal of people interaction such as interviewing, counselling, selling and helping.

Mode is the group of characteristics that identifies the way an individual prefers to receive information. The four on Canfield's Learning Style Inventory are listening, reading, ironic and direct experience. Listening is receiving information through lectures, speakers, etc. Reading is gaining information through the printed word. Ironic is interpreting charts and graphs or viewing illustrations, movie slides and pictures. Direct experience is receiving information or gaining knowledge through handling or performing in the shop, the laboratory or on field trips. etc. At first glance these may seem to be only classroom activities. But when we do a thorough job analysis and take into consideration the kinds of activities performed on that job and the way individuals on that job receives their information or directions and keep updated, we begin to see the importance of this group of characteristics. Some jobs or companies may schedule regular briefing sessions, instructional periods or training sessions and deliver the information through lectures. Some may rely on much information to be relayed by telephone, etc. - all relying on listening. Other occupations may distribute their information through the printed word, thereby relying on reading not only for immediate pertinent information but for keeping the individual updated on new techniques, supplies etc.

Certain occupations may present a great deal of their information through charts and graphs or expect individuals to gain much information through reading, blueprints or similar kinds of drawings which would be Iconic. Other occupations may rely more on direct experience - gaining information through handling, performing or doing things in a shop or laboratory which might be commonly found in a manufacturing type setting. The direct experience through what we would call the field trip in the classroom setting could be an important characteristic for occupations which rely on observation such as our police force and investigative types of occupations.

The characteristic Canfield identifies as expectancy identifies how well the student expects to achieve. While this really is intended for achievement in the classroom setting there may be some carry-over into how successful an individual expects to be in the world of work. The self-fulfilling prophecy often hinders the one who has the capability but does not expect to be successful. On the other hand, a high expectation of success without the necessary skills can be misleading. Therefore, it would be wise to counsel with the student so that all things considered, his expectations for success will be parallel with the skills and abilities he has. The expectancy scale may need special attention when working with disadvantaged and handicapped students. For the most part, these students are not acheiving well in school and have had a history of failure so their expectation scale is often very low.

Bowe and Razegki propose that a major problem in career counselling is that parents often have low career aspirations for their handicapped children. If parents have low expectations for their children and the student has experienced failure for a period of time it is very easy to see why his expectancy of achieving success would be low. To compound the problem these individuals have, Hohenshil states that counselors, on the other hand, aren't trained to work with the handicapped. In addition, Hohenshil states that, "special educators don't have a good knowledge of vocational programs, and vocational educators are equally lacking in knowledge of handicapping conditions and their implications for learning and performance. This combination of inadequacies leaves the handicapped student lacking in both services and experiences that are important enough for all students but vitally so to the handicapped.

Being almost totally excluded from both services and experiences related to the world of work certainly does not provide any foundation for the disadvantaged or handicapped student to build much expectancy for success in the world of work.

In using the learning style inventory as a guidance tool, one needs to identify the strongest preferences from the condition, content and mode groups and compare these characteristics to those characteristics identified in a thorough job analysis or task analysis of specific occupations. Many occupations may be described in rather general terms and to evaluate the probability of work satisfaction for an individual may need the work setting more clearly defined. To explain this further, an individual may prefer working with numbers, attention to detail, prefer working with peers and dislike working alone. He may have decided he really likes bookkeeping and maybe would like to be a CPA. While this is quite simplified it may serve to express a point. He says he likes bookkeeping. His learning style shows he prefers working with numbers and he likes detail. That is all very well and important for a CPA. One problem - he really dislikes working alone and much prefers working with peers. He may want to look at occupations where he can use these skills but in those areas of the occupation where there may be more peer interaction - maybe something in the area of auditing or being a bank examiner.

Understanding one's own learning style provides the student with self-knowledge about the kind of environment within which he prefers to interact. Comparing the characteristics of the individual to a complete task analysis of an occupation can provide more complete information on which the student can base his decision on whether to pursue that particular career. This is not to say that learning style is a replacement for all kinds of assessment recommended in the career guidance process. It is necessary that the students interests, abilities and values also be taken into consideration. Learning style is just another

dimension which may help the individual to select an occupation where the stimulus conditions of the tasks performed in an occupation will be positive reinforcers for the characteristics of the individual. In addition, information from the learning style can help the individual select the organization where the stimulus conditions in the work environment will be positive reinforcers for the characteristics of the individual.

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